

2018

Strategies Used by Retail Store Managers to Engage Customers

Jefferson Lee Haddox
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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Jefferson L. Haddox

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Strategies Used by Retail Store Managers to Engage Customers

by

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MBA, Tarleton State University, 2009

BBA, University of North Texas, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2018

Abstract

Between the years 2013 and 2016, e-commerce sales grew as a percent of total retail sales in the United States from 5.8% to 8.5%, an increase of \$129 billion. Some brick-and-mortar (B & M) retailers struggle with maintaining the historic levels of revenue in their stores. A multiple case study design with retail store managers was used to understand what factors engage customers to shop at B & M store locations. The consumer-dominant value creation logic was the conceptual framework. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with 5 retail store managers in Texas who demonstrated successful strategies for engaging customers in their B & M stores, and notes from observations. Data from semistructured interviews were analyzed with a traditional method to identify themes. The found themes included fun at work, customer connection, relationship, pride, and genuine care. The implications of this study for positive social change include the potential to enhance the economic vitality and development in the surrounding community by creating additional jobs and generating additional income for members of the community that could be spent in local economies.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to my family: Kim, my wife, and my two boys, Gavin and Grady. Kim, you have been extremely supportive as you have sacrificed our time together and allowed me focus on this study. Without your constant affirmation and support, I would not have been able to complete this study. Words cannot express my gratitude and love for you. Gavin and Grady, you have been more than understanding as I have spent countless hours in my office researching and writing. My entire family has been so encouraging and supportive during this endeavor; I could not have done this without you. To my family, I am forever grateful.

Acknowledgments

I'd like to acknowledge my academic mentor, Dr. Robert Banasik, for his steadfast commitment to helping me succeed. He was always willing to make himself available to discuss the various elements involved in the process of bringing this study to life. He was always open and honest with his feedback even when I did not want to hear it. I am thankful for Dr. Banasik's mentorship throughout this entire process.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

As online shopping has become more prevalent, revenue in brick-and-mortar (B & M) store locations has started to decline. Due to this business issue, B & M retailers have begun to struggle with maintaining the historic levels of revenue in their B & M stores (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). B & M store managers must find ways to differentiate the in-store experience and engage customers to visit their B & M stores. In this doctoral study, I sought to understand what factors engage customers to shop at B & M store locations.

Background of the Problem

As of 2015, 77% of the United States population had access to the Internet (Ryan & Lewis, 2017). With the proliferation of connected devices, more consumers turned to an online channel to purchase merchandise; 8.5% of all retail sales were conducted online by the end of 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). This phenomenon has led to a decline in revenue at B & M store locations. The decline in revenue at B & M store locations has left retail store managers with costly real estate investments that are declining in revenue (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). Despite this shift in some customers' shopping behavior, there are few studies that address the need for retail store managers to have strategies that engage customers to shop at their B & M stores.

Problem Statement

The behavior of some retail consumers has shifted from traditional store shopping experiences to online shopping experiences due to the proliferation of e-commerce (Sanjeev, Sai Vijay, & Parsad, 2016). Between the years 2013 through 2016, e-commerce

sales grew as a percent of total retail sales in the United States from 5.8% to 8.5%, an increase of \$129 billion (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The general business problem of this study is that some B & M retailers have experienced declining in-store revenues. The specific business problem is that some B & M store managers do not have strategies that engage customers to shop at their B & M stores.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that retail store managers used to engage customers to shop at their B & M stores. The target population consisted of five B & M store managers from the state of Texas who have experienced increases in revenue in their B & M stores. This target population was appropriate for this study because some B & M store managers have experienced positive financial results by enhancing customers' in-store experiences (see Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). The implications for positive social change include the potential to enhance the economic vitality and development in the surrounding community by creating additional jobs and by generating additional money that could be spent in the local economy.

Nature of the Study

I selected a qualitative research methodology for this study. Using the qualitative methodology enables researchers to gain an understanding of participants' experiences (Alase, 2017). This qualitative methodology is appropriate because it can allow the researcher to gain insights into the strategies that B & M store managers used to engage customers to shop at their B & M stores. Cairney and St. Denny (2015) indicated that the qualitative exploratory methodology is the most appropriate research design for studying

social phenomena that cannot be easily quantified. Since my study was about the B & M store experience, a quantitative methodology was not appropriate because such experiences cannot be reduced to statistical data. I chose not to use a mixed methods methodology to analyze trends relating to the revenue outcomes for each of the B & M stores because store level revenue data are not publicly available. I chose not to use a mixed methods methodology because I did not have access to this type of quantitative data to use in combination with the qualitative data generated in the interviews.

I used a qualitative multiple case study design to explore the B & M store experience. The designs I considered for this study included narrative research, phenomenological research, ethnographic research, and case study research. Using narrative research provides a life perspective from the participants' stories (Humphrey, 2014) but would not have been appropriate for this study because telling a story from past experiences may not be relevant. The purpose of this study was to gain the perception of the participants within their current B & M retail organizations. By using a phenomenological research design, researchers seek to provide a summary of the meanings of lived experiences of the participants (Gergen, Josselson, & Freeman, 2015). The personal meanings of past experiences would not have provided insights regarding the retailer's strategies that I was seeking to explore in this study and therefore a phenomenological research design would not have been relevant. An ethnographic research design helps researchers to focus on identifying self-defined beliefs and behaviors within a group (Edberg et al., 2015). Because I was not focused on identifying trends in specific cultures or societies and because participants vary across cultural

groups, an ethnographic research design was not appropriate for this study. A case study research design is used to identify patterns and build explanations from the collected information (Lewis, 2015). A single case study design can help researchers focus on a single case unit, whereas a multiple case study design will allow a researcher to evaluate multiple aspects (Lewis, 2015). I was focused on strategies that have helped B & M managers engage customers to shop at their B & M stores.

Research Question

The following primary research question guided my study: What strategies do B & M store managers use to engage customers to shop at their B & M stores?

Interview Questions

1. Please describe the strategies that you have used to engage customers to shop at your store.
2. How have you assessed the effectiveness of your strategies used to engage customers?
3. Which strategies did you find to be most successful?
4. How did your customers respond to the different strategies that you have utilized?
5. Please describe specific in-store experiences that your store provides that cannot be replicated in an online shopping channel.
6. Based upon your experiences and customers' feedback, what are the sensory experiences that create the best responses from your customers?
7. What else can you tell me about your successful customer engagement strategies?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based upon the consumer-dominant value creation logic (CDL) framework. Developed by Heinonen et al. (2010), the CDL helps researchers focus on the experiences of consumers and the perceived value they receive from an experience. The concept of value creation has been a core element of many marketing strategies (Gallarza, Gil-Saura, & Holbrook, 2011); the CDL framework further helps researchers focus on the concept of placing the customer at the center of the interaction rather than focusing on a product or service. The primary components of the CDL are business perspective, customer logic, offering, value formation, and customer ecosystem (Heinonen et al., 2010). Business perspective is about moving beyond the realm of marketing and considering all aspects of the business (Gallarza, Gil-Saura, & Holbrook, 2011). Customer logic is the concept of patterns that integrate activities, experiences and goals (Heinonen et al., 2010). Offering refers to the products, services, solutions, and promises offered by the retailer (Strandvik, Holmlund, & Edvardsson, 2012). Value formation is the process by which value emerges based on a customer's use and interaction (Heinonen et al., 2013). This value-in-use is based on the outcome of the product and experience created by the retailer (Heinonen et al., 2013). The customer ecosystem is the context in which the customer is making a decision; the customer ecosystem includes the retailer, other customers, and physical and virtual structures that are involved in the process (Medberg & Heinonen, 2014). The CDL focuses on the customer and the experiences that they have while shopping. Therefore, the use of CDL is an appropriate conceptual framework for reviewing the strategies that retail store

managers used to engage customers to shop at their B & M stores.

Operational Definitions

Throughout this study, I have used several terms that are commonly used in academic literature. These terms are helpful in understanding the background of the problem.

Brick-and-mortar: Retailers that have a physical store presence (de Leeuw, Minguela-Rata, Sabet, Boter, & Siguroardottir, 2016)

Connected devices: An electronic device, often portable, that has wireless connectivity to the internet (Wang, Malthouse, & Krishnamurthi, 2015).

Customer experience: The interaction between a retailer and the customer (Reimers & Chao, 2014).

E-commerce: The activity of buying or selling products or services through the internet (Ma, 2017).

In-store experience: The encounter that a customer has while shopping in a B & M store (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015).

Omnichannel retailing: The emphasis of omnichannel retailing is on the interplay between channels and brands (Beck & Rygl, 2015). An omnichannel strategy helps brands to optimize the customer experience and redesign channels and touch points from the customer perspective (Picot-Coupey, Hure, & Piveteau, 2016).

Retail store managers: The person responsible for the operations of a physical retail storefront; all employees working in the store report to the retail store manager (Kumar, 2018).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are those elements that are outside of my scope of control and that cannot be proved (Feller, Mealli, & Miratrix, 2017). For the purposes of my study, I have treated these assumptions as truth. The assumptions made in my study are grounded in general business practices. I have assumed the participants have a basic working knowledge of the sales organization in which they work. I assumed that the skills and training for retail store managers are similar from store to store, and that the expectations of each retail store manager are the same.

Limitations

Limitations are those elements that are outside of the scope of control of the researcher and have the potential to create weakness in a study (Argouslidis, Baltas, & Mavrommatis, 2014). One of the limitations in my study was the retail store manager talent. The skill level of the retail store manager is outside of the control of the researcher, but it could have an influence on their level of engagement with a customer.

Delimitations

Delimitations are those elements that define the boundaries and limit the scope of a study (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015). My study was limited to the scope of retail store managers in the North Texas geographical area. Because of this, my findings may be specific to B & M retailers in the North Texas area and not be transferrable to other regions.

Significance of the Study

This study may be significant because the findings might provide information that leads to improved strategies for retail store managers. B & M store managers are faced with the challenge of creating B & M experiences that are engaging. In my study, I have attempted to identify and understand what strategies retail store managers used to engage customers to shop at their B & M stores. As retail store managers create engaging in-store experiences, they have the potential to increase revenues for their B & M stores (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). The implications for positive social change include the potential to enhance the economic vitality and development in the surrounding community by creating additional jobs and generating additional income for members of the community that could be spent in local economies.

Review of Literature

I will begin the review of the literature with an overview of the CDL conceptual framework. I will then discuss the concepts found in the literature that pertain to the retail strategies that could have an impact on the customer's in-store experience. The key concepts include retail innovation, in-store technology, omnichannel retailing, consumer behavior, and the store associate. The literature review includes sources from journals, government data, and scholarly book publications. These sources were located using research databases such as Business Source Complete, Emerald Insight, and SAGE Premier. Keyword searches included the following terms: *customer experience*, *retail innovation*, *omnichannel*, *value cocreation*, *customer engagement*, *relationship marketing*, *customer ecosystem*, and *retail engagement strategies*. At least 85% of these

citations are peer reviewed and have been published within the last 5 years. Table 1 depicts the breakdown of the various citations used in my study, both in the full document and in the literature review.

Table 1

Publication Breakdown for Full Document and Literature Review

	Total sources	Year published (2014-2018)	Percentage published 2014-2018	Peer-reviewed sources	Percentage peer-reviewed
Full document	139	124	89.2%	133	95.7%
Literature review	95	95	100.0%	95	100.0%

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that retail store managers use to engage customers to shop at their B & M stores. Several elements can affect customers' experience in B & M stores. The following paragraphs discuss the customer-dominant value creation logic and several other topics that pertain to customers' in-store experiences.

Consumer-Dominant Value Creation Logic

CDL was developed by Heinonen et al. (2010) and is a concept based on the idea that businesses should focus on customers rather than on products, services, or systems. Strandvik et al. (2012) stated that when businesses put the customer first, all other aspects of doing businesses fall into place. The CDL framework describes the customer at the center of all interactions (Finne & Gronroos, 2017). Heinonen et al. (2010, 2013) began to see a shift toward a customer focus compared to a service and interaction focus. This

service and interaction focus was termed service-dominant logic (SDL) and has been a widely accepted strategy by many marketers (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). Vargo and Lusch (2016) further expanded on the concept of SDL by adding an ecosystem to the framework. As this framework continued to evolve and SDL broadened the scope of understanding marketing functions, SDL remained focused on service and integration with the customer (Heinonen et al., 2010). This continued focus on SDL led to the recognition of a gap in understanding of the holistic customer experience; that gap resulted in the creation of CDL (Anker, Sparks, Moutinho, & Gronroos, 2015). With the SDL framework in mind, Heinonen et al. (2010) developed the CDL to shift the focus from service to the customer. In the paragraphs to follow, I will show how others have further built upon the foundation of the CDL and discuss how it is applicable to this study.

Heinonen and Strandvik (2015) expanded on the concept of the CDL by offering five distinct foundational elements of CDL: (a) marketing as a business, (b) customer logics as a central element, (c) the customer's point of view, (d) formed value, and (e) the prevalence of the customer ecosystem (Medberg & Heinonen, 2014). Heinonen and Strandvik pointed out that the five elements of CDL raise the idea that retailers should consider the needs of the customer in every decision, whether in the boardroom or on the sales floor with the customer. Using CDL, researchers could begin to quantify the elements of a customer's goals, activities, and tasks that are at the forefront of their customer experience (Lipkin, 2016). As retailers work towards a customer-centric approach to business, they must find ways to listen to their customers.

Cheung and To (2015) further expanded on the CDL framework by adding that cocreation of value is a vital part of the how the customer realizes value in the experience; the value received by the customer is created by both the organization creating the experience and the customer interacting in the experience. Cheung and To (2016) defined this as the cocreation of service recovery and indicated that it should be used in conjunction with CDL as another way of keeping the customer at the center of an organization's decisions.

The foundational elements of the CDL were built on the consumption experience framework. Consumption experience is a framework for understanding that consumption of a good or service is more than just filling a need; it involves rich emotions, playful creativity, and leisure activities (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). To better understand the components of consumption, the authors separated them into two segments: environmental inputs and consumer inputs (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The environmental inputs include product, communication content, and verbal and nonverbal stimuli (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Consumer inputs include customer resources, shopping tasks at hand, types of involvement, search activities, and an individual's characteristics (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) defined a framework that sought to measure the attributes of the consumption experience. They argued that consumer buying behavior can be explained from an information processing perspective, but that approach neglects the value of the consumption experience (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The consumption experience is rich with emotions, playful creativity, and leisure activities. Focusing on the consumption experience allows

researchers to understand how other attributes play into the purchase process such as multisensory enjoyment, the pursuit of pleasure, dimensions of communication, and the role of play in providing enjoyment and fun (Reimers & Chao, 2014). It is important to understand the consumption experience because it played a foundational role in the work that Heinonen et al. (2010) did to develop the CDL.

Since the customer experience framework's creation in 1982, several researchers have built upon the initial framework. Lanier and Rader (2015) suggested that this framework was limited to our understandings of the consumption experience as a function. They argued that the framework should be expanded to examine the consumption experience based on the dimensions of a structural relationship and the functional consequences (Lanier & Rader, 2015). To facilitate this, the authors identified four primary types of consumption: (a) performance, (b) liberatory experiences, (c) stochastic, and (d) adventure (Lanier & Rader, 2015). Lanier and Rader identified a new means of understanding consumption experiences that allows for a view of stochastic and adventure experiences but also provides a better understanding of the experiences relating to performance and liberator experiences.

Caru and Cova (2003) also expanded on Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) initial framework. While Caru and Cova complemented Holbrook and Hirschman on some elements of their work to define the consumption experience framework, they indicated that the framework was ill-defined. To bring a deeper definition to the term *experience* as it relates to the consumer, Caru and Cova broke the consumption experience into four modes of provisions: (a) market, (b) state, (c) household, and (d) communal. Given those

further defined elements, the authors indicated that not all consumption experiences could be planned within a market; often, the experience just happens, and sometimes, brands are unable to create these types of experiences (Caru & Cova, 2003). Therefore, brands can break the monotony by creating extraordinary experiences that create something unexpected for the customer and stimulate the five senses (Caru & Cova, 2003).

Holbrook (2006) revisited his original theory of consumption experience 14 years after its inception. He further concluded that three aspects of the consumption experience that bring value are fantasies, feelings, and fun, some of which can be measured, and some cannot (Holbrook, 2006). These components and the continued development of the CDL further reiterate the importance of putting the customer at the center of an experience.

The understanding of customers and their experiences in the retail environment has developed over the past 30 years (Pantano, 2014). The research and frameworks have moved beyond the limited view of product, service, or systems and have expanded into a customer-centric view. That customer-centric view was exposed with Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) consumer experience framework and has developed into the rich framework of CDL (Heinonen et al., 2010).

History of Retail Innovation

Throughout the 19th century, the primary means of retail was the local general store; there was no focus on frills or experience, the retail stores within this era simply accommodated the basic needs of the local customer by selling a few staples such as milk, bread, and a few household goods (McArthur, Weaven, & Dant, 2016). In 1886, Sears & Roebuck Co. opened a catalog business that spawned innovation in retail (Sears,

2017). They began creating a catalog from which customers could purchase goods and have them delivered to their home (Sears, 2017). They offered merchandise including apparel, kitchen appliances, machinery, and manufactured homes (Sears, 2017). The goal of the retailer was to make quality goods available to the masses (Sears, 2017). It was not until the mid-1900s that the department store began to emerge (Mila, 2016). Within these department stores, the square footage was divided into various sections selling items that ranged from apparel to home appliances (Mila, 2016). Sears participated in the department store phenomenon by opening its first B & M store in Chicago in 1923 (Sears, 2017).

With the advent of the department stores in the mid-1900s, the concept of shopping malls began to emerge (Gomes & Fabio, 2017). Fueled by the affordability of the automobile and the shift into the suburban life, malls and shopping centers began to emerge in most major cities (Gomes & Fabio, 2017). These malls became destinations for consumers not only to purchase goods but also to socialize and enjoy entertainment. The first fully-enclosed and climate-controlled shopping mall was opened in 1956 in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Ingene, 2014). Building on that framework, value chains and club stores began to emerge in the 1970s, focused less on experience and more on selling commodity merchandise at low prices in a convenient one-stop location (Gomes & Fabio, 2017).

In the late 1990s, e-commerce businesses began to emerge. In 1994, the first e-commerce transaction was recorded: a Sting album via the computer (Lewis, 1994). The following year, both Amazon.com and eBay.com opened their virtual doors and began

selling merchandise via the Internet (Lewis, 1994). Those businesses, as well as others, grew quickly by tapping into a marketplace that had almost no saturation. As the cost of creating e-commerce businesses had declined, almost every B & M retailer established an online presence; in addition to those B & M retailers, many new online-only retailers have emerged and started to take market share (Luo & Sun, 2016). The advancement of online retailing has created some challenges for B & M retailers; developing a strong shopping experience in B & M retail stores could help to combat the expansion of online only retailers.

This history points to the small amounts of innovation coming from the retail industry. Innovation in retail, which consists of new experiences for the customer, is one of the most critical elements for competing successfully (Pantano, 2014). While there have been moments of innovation, the basic elements of retail have not fundamentally changed. To help overcome the business problem that some B & M store managers have experienced by not having strategies that engage customers to shop, B & M store managers will need to evolve and innovate.

In-Store Technology

While the history of retail innovation shows that retailers are slow to bring enhancements into the B & M store, some B & M retailers are leveraging various types of in-store technology to aid in the shopping experience. Some of the technology is focused on self-service, allowing the customer to purchase goods without interacting with a human (Hristov & Reynolds, 2015). Other elements of in-store technology are focused on bringing the product to life for the customer by adding product information and videos or

augmented reality (AR), virtually showing a product in an end-use setting (Javornik, 2016). In this section, I will discuss the literature written on the use of in-store technology.

Technology that enables value cocreation has been cited as some of the most useful in-store technology (Balaji & Roy, 2016). Value cocreation, as it relates to retail, is the idea that retailers are not the sole contributor of value; the customer takes an active role in creating the perceived value (Lal Dey, Pandit, Saren, Bhowmick, & Woodruffe-Burton, 2016). An example of technology that enables value cocreation could be a digital room designer that allows the customer to bring the product to life and understanding how the merchandise might look in their home before they purchase it. This type of digital in-store tool enables the customer to create value alongside the technology and the in-store associate. Balaji and Roy (2016) conducted research indicating that customers value cocreation influences their willingness to use in-store technology. As B & M retailers consider the use of technology in-store, they should consider hardware and software that enables customers to take control of the cocreation of value.

Self-service in the form of technology is another way for customers to cocreate value while in a B & M store. Some B & M retailers have started to add self-checkout, where the customer can scan their items and pay at a terminal without having to physically interact with a store associate (Leng & Wee, 2017). This form of self-service has allowed the customer to be part of the value cocreation process and has created enhanced customer satisfaction and heightened the intent to re-use the technology in the future (Turner & Shockley, 2014). While this form of value cocreation has been most

successful in B & M store settings that offer a convenience factor, there are potential implications for other use cases across various types of B & M retailers.

Another technology that retailers have started to use is AR. AR enables a consumer to bring a virtual product into the real world to visualize how a product might look in a physical space (Javornik, 2016). This technology allows the customer to integrate the virtual world into the real world (Chung, Han, & Joun, 2015). An example of this would be using AR to see how a piece of furniture might look in a consumer's living room before purchasing the product. While this technology remains in its infancy, retailers are starting to test use-cases and customer responses to AR (Pantano, Rese, & Baier, 2017). This technology has shown that it can enhance the customer's experience in a retail environment (Poushneh & Vasquez-Parraga, 2017). Pantano et al. (2017) found that consumers have shown a positive attitude towards the use of AR technology with the specific use-case of trying on sunglasses and eyeglasses before purchase. Their study further indicated that consumers would be willing to substitute these virtual goods for physical goods as they made their buying decisions (Pantano et al., 2017). This is a strong indicator for retailers offering a solution that allows the customer to virtually try on a product, that there is a potential of reducing in-store inventory and the cost associated with the ownership without sacrificing sales. As this technology matures, retailers will have to continue testing and measuring the impacts of AR.

One of the challenges that B & M retailers face when it comes to in-store technology is measuring the impact that the technology has on sales. Hristov and Reynolds (2015) considered measuring in-store technology in two separate ways:

behavior related (nonfinancial) and outcome related (financial). Behavior related innovation is the means for growth or change; it is a component of an organization's strategy that leads to differentiation (Hristov & Reynolds, 2015). Outcome related innovation is more tangible and can be defined by generating a process or growing scalability. To gain an understanding of how technology impacts the outcomes of the customer, Kim, Lee, Mun, and Johnson (2017) used the technology acceptance model to aid in understanding the business impacts. In a quantitative study conducted at a fashion retailer, Kim et al. (2017) found that the impact of technology resulted in mixed evidence that the interaction with in-store technology altered the business outcomes.

In this section, I discussed the literature written regarding the use of in-store technology to help overcome the business problem that some B & M store managers have experienced by not having strategies that engage customers to shop at their B & M stores. Some B & M retailers are leveraging various types of in-store technology like customer self-service (Hristov & Reynolds, 2015) or videos and AR, (Javornik, 2016). While there are challenges with some of this technology, there were instances in the literature that indicated that some form of technology could be beneficial to engaging customers to shop at B & M stores.

Omnichannel Retailing

With the addition of e-commerce shopping channels and the proliferation of connected mobile devices, the way customers shop a retailer has changed (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2017). Omnichannel retailing provides the customer with a seamless experience across all touchpoints: in-store, online, through a catalog, and through a phone

call to the call center (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). This seamless experience can include pricing, promotions, merchandise, messaging, marketing, and fulfillment. This concept began to emerge post the multichannel era of retail; as e-commerce business began to emerge in the mid-1990s, those retailers with both an online and a B & M presence were known as multichannel retailers (Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman, 2015). Different from multichannel retailing, omnichannel retailing creates a synergistic shopping experience for the customer across every touchpoint offered by the retailer (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2017). As B & M retailers have learned, having a physical store base in conjunction with their e-commerce presence may allow the retailer to maximize their potential customer reach and subsequent sales (Herhausen, Binder, Schoegel, & Herrmann, 2015). An omnichannel retailing strategy has proven to generate higher levels of trust and loyalty with the customer; this higher level of trust and loyalty leads to increased conversion rates and greater opportunities to cross-sell other merchandise (Cao & Li, 2015). Omnichannel retailing could help to overcome the business problem that some B & M store managers have experienced by not having strategies that engage customers to shop at their B & M stores.

Omnichannel retailing can offer several benefits to both the retailer and the customer. These benefits that I will discuss are (a) consistent message, (b) competitive advantage, (c) fulfillment methods, and (d) easy returns. Looking first at the retailer, an omnichannel retailing strategy offers a brand with a consistent message across all selling platforms (Cao & Li, 2015). Because a customer's experience comprises multiple contacts across multiple marketing media (often simultaneously), it becomes important

for the retailer to maintain a constant brand position and promotional message across all the various touchpoints (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2017). This consistency builds trust and loyalty with the customer and has the potential of generating higher revenue for the retailer (Cao & Li, 2015).

The second possible benefit that omnichannel retailing provides for the retailer is a competitive advantage. Herhausen et al. (2015) found that customers preferred to shop at a retailer that had an omnichannel solution over those retailers that do not offer an omnichannel solution. Customers often prefer omnichannel retail shopping experiences due to the availability of inventory (Herhausen et al., 2015). Many customers are unwilling to wait for a retailer to ship the goods to their home; omnichannel retailers offer immediacy in their assortment by providing the customer with product availability at a B & M store near their location (Parise, Guinan, & Kafka, 2016). The inverse can also occur; B & M retailers may not have the inventory in-store but can order the goods from their extended online assortment (Parise, Guinan, & Kafka, 2016). Because omnichannel strategies have started to reveal a B & M retailer's inventory to the customer, via their website, before going to the B & M store, retailers now have to rethink when and where they house product inventory (Saroukhanoff, 2017). This has benefited the customer by creating more accessibility to the product, but it has also created more supply chain challenges for the retailer.

From a customer's standpoint, omnichannel retailing allows the customer to choose their journey along the path to purchase, allowing the customer to choose how, when, and where to interact with the brand (Mahrous & Hassan, 2017). Omnichannel

retailing puts the customer at the center of the decision-making process; this customer-centric focus provides the customer with many benefits, including enriched product information, enhanced fulfillment methods, and seamless returns (Bell, Gallino, & Moreno, 2014).

Before the onset of the Internet and e-commerce, consumers would seek out product information by visiting B & M stores (Rodriguez-Torrico, Cabezudo, & San-Marin, 2017). This effort to learn about product was timely for consumers as they visited multiple B & M stores and relied on store associates to be fully knowledgeable about the product they were selling. To help become more competitive, retailers must find ways to better inform their potential customers of the values and attributes associated with the products they are selling (Meise, Rudolph, Kenning, & Phillips, 2014). Omnichannel retailing has helped to bridge the product information gap for consumers, creating a beneficial outcome for the customer. B & M retailers could leverage an omnichannel strategy to aid the customer in the research phase of their path to purchase.

The third benefit that omnichannel retailing provides for the customer is a broader offering of fulfillment methods. Because omnichannel retailing allows the customer to access merchandise through many different delivery methods, the customer has the choice to pick the goods up in store or to have them delivered to their home. If the customer is in-store, they can buy the goods and take them home that same day, they can order the goods and have them delivered to the store for pickup, or they can order the goods and have them delivered to their home. If the customer is shopping via their personal computing device, they can choose to have the goods picked up in-store on the

same day (assuming the store has inventory), they can have the goods shipped to the store, or they can have the goods delivered to their home. With omnichannel retailing, the fulfillment options for the customer become vast (Hubner, Wollenburg, & Holzapfel, 2016). The customer has additional fulfillment options with the emergence of omnichannel.

The fourth benefit that the customer receives from an omnichannel retailer is the ability to return merchandise via any delivery channel. Customers are changing their shopping behavior based upon the ease of returning their purchases (Bernon, Cullen, & Gorst, 2016). Options for returning a purchase in an omnichannel environment typically include returning to the B & M store or a designated drop area or inserting into a parcel or postal carrier network. These options create convenience for the customer, but it does create challenges for the retailer as they attempt to manage the inventory across their entire retail chain. These benefits, (a) consistent message, (b) competitive advantage, (c) fulfillment methods, and (d) easy returns, can aid in Omnichannel retailing; these benefits could help to overcome the business problem that some B & M store managers have experienced by not have strategies that engage customers to shop at their B & M stores.

While there are many benefits that come from an omnichannel retail strategy, executing an omnichannel strategy does come with challenges and increased complexities. As interactive media and mobile devices have evolved, selling to customers has become more complex (Medrano, Olarte-Pascual, Pelefrin-Borondo, & Sierra-Murillo, 2016). One of the challenges that retailers face within an omnichannel

environment is product returns. One of the compelling elements for a customer to shop with an omnichannel retailer is the ability to purchase goods online and return to a B & M store (Beck & Rygl, 2015). While this is advantageous for the customer, it has the potential of creating unwanted inventory in the B & M store. Retail distribution systems were not originally built to facilitate this type of complex inventory management (Hubner, Holzapfel, et al., 2016). Some retailers operating within an omnichannel framework maintain separate warehouses as opposed to integrating their inventory across all touchpoints (Hubner et al., 2015). To alleviate some of the pressure that these returns are putting on the B & M stores, retailers need to build more robust reverse logistics capabilities (Hubner, Wollenburg, et al., 2016). As retailers attempt to overcome this challenge, they will be burdened with the cost and complexity of revamping their internal logistics systems.

Capturing customer information and tracking customer behavior across the various retail touchpoints can also be a challenge for B & M retailers. In the retail environment, marketers use a system referred to as a Customer Relationship Management system. This system is the centralized location that houses all data associated with the customer. Within an omnichannel retailer, it becomes more complex to track a customer as they progress through and across the various touchpoints (Picot-Coupey et al., 2016). As a customer uses the in-store environment as a form of a showroom and returns to the online channel to make a purchase, tracking that behavior becomes difficult (Rapp, Baker, Bachrach, Ogilvie, & Beitelspacher, 2015). To combat this challenge, B & M retailers will need to find ways to engage with the customer while in the store; this

engagement could offer the customer with a reward or benefit for providing their information, and in exchange, the retailer would have visibility of the customer and could track their interaction through the various omnichannel touchpoints.

Consumer Behavior

With the continued proliferation of connected devices (Wang et al., 2015), more consumers are turning to e-commerce to conduct their retail purchases. At the end of 2015, 77% of the United States population had access to the Internet (Ryan & Lewis, 2017), and 8.5% of all retail sales were conducted online (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Both of these trends are projected to continue to grow over the next 5 years. The Internet has created new shopping opportunities for consumers by providing both entertainment and utilitarian values (Xia, 2010). As customers turn to the online channel, they may have different goals ranging from browsing for recreation, to pre-shopping for a specific type of item, to having a planned purchase in mind (Raphaeli, Goldstein, & Fink, 2017). Mallapragada, Chandukala, and Liu (2016) defined two distinct stages in the online shopping process: browsing and purchasing. The browsing process is where the customer pre-shops and gathers information from the retailer's website; the purchasing stage is where the customer transacts, exchanging money for merchandise. In traditional B & M stores, associates would interact with the customer and gain an understanding of where they are in the shopping process. As the consumer behavior begins to shift towards online shopping (Wang et al., 2015), the retailer loses the ability to directly interact with the customer to ascertain where they are in the shopping process (Raphaeli et al., 2017). It is up to the retailer to interpret behavioral cues that may indicate where the customer is in

the purchase process.

Regardless of the specific intent of the shopper, having access to a retailer's online catalog has altered how the customer behaves and interacts with a retailer. There are several benefits that the customer receives from having the ability to shop online; those benefits include convenience, a broader assortment, and product reviews. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss those three benefits.

Convenience and ease of purchase have emerged as the primary factors that causes customers to purchase online versus in-store (Lai, Ulhas, & Lin, 2014). Understanding that convenience is important, Yadav and Pavlou (2014) indicated that online technology enables simplification, creates convenience, and enables efficiency in the shopping process. When a customer utilizes these online technologies, their time associated with buying consideration is reduced. This reduction in time is a result of being better informed regarding pricing, product availability, and choice of product. Bhagat (2015) conducted further research that is in line with Lai, Ulhas, and Lin's finding that indicated convenience as the primary factor that leads a customer to make an online purchase.

Another factor that has led to the consumer's shift in behavior towards purchasing online is the availability of a broader assortment. A traditional B & M retailer has limited space on their selling floor and limited space in their stock room; this constraint, from a real estate perspective, has led the retailer to only stock those items that have a high velocity of sales. In comparison, online retailers have few retail space constraints (Ma, 2016). Online retailers can employ drop-ship strategies that afford them the benefit of

selling goods without owning the inventory (Li, Lu, & Talebian, 2015). Leveraging this strategy allows online retailers to grow their product offerings exponentially. This strategy of offering a radically broader product assortment online has created a shift in customer behavior towards shopping online and it has created increased revenue streams for those online retailers (Ma, 2016).

The availability of product information and product reviews is another factor that has led to the customer's shift towards online purchases. Product reviews have become an important part of the e-commerce ecosystem and are an important aspect of instilling trust in the customer (Tamimi & Sebastianelli, 2015). By making product reviews available to the customer, retailers have experienced a higher level of commitment from the customer and have experienced increased levels of customer satisfaction (Tamimi & Sebastianelli, 2015). Because product reviews are generated by the customer, they often convey a higher level of trust with the consumer than what the retailer might promote about the product. This strategy lends itself to the CDL because of the focus it has on providing the customer with the information they need to make a buying decision. These three benefits, convenience, a broader assortment, and product reviews, are several factors that have influenced the customer's desire to shop online.

In addition to identifying the influences that lead to customers purchasing online, there are several barriers that reduce the likelihood for customers to shop online (Bhagat, 2015); those barriers include transit times, delivery details, and returns and exchange information. When customers purchase merchandise from a B & M store, most often they can carry the merchandise home with them. There is an instant gratification associated

with the purchase. When purchasing online, that instant gratification can be challenging due to the transit time associated with delivering the goods. If the retailer does not clearly state on their website when and how the merchandise will arrive, uncertainties can exist with the customer and cause them to fail to complete their purchase online (Modak, 2017). While delivery time has not been an indication in customer satisfaction, it does have a role in determining if the customer will purchase on the retailer's website (Ma, 2017). This is an important implication for retail managers, as they should consider displaying the anticipated delivery dates to the customer as far up in the purchase funnel as possible. This tactic has the potential of increasing the retailer's conversion performance metrics on their website.

In addition to transit times and delivery details, returns and exchange information can also create a barrier that reduces the likelihood for customers to shop online (Bhagat, 2015). As customers interact with retailers online, they need to have visibility to how the retailer will manage returns. Retailers often struggle with making the return and exchange process overtly visible to the customer due to the high cost and negative implications on profit that come from returns (Walsh, Albrecht, Kunz, & Hofacker, 2016). This lack of visibility creates uncertainty with the customer and reduces the propensity of their purchase. To help customers overcome this barrier, retail managers should consider providing clarity to the customer regarding the returns process and set the expectation early in the purchase process (de Leeuw et al., 2016). This information regarding transit times, delivery details, and return details has the potential to positively impact the retailer's business by providing guidance on the areas of focus for their website.

Store Associate

An important aspect of the B & M store is the store associate (Braun, Hadwich, & Bruhn, 2017). With the growth in assortment and buying options, the customer has many retail options; the role of the store associate has evolved from simply facilitating a transaction to playing a more active role in the value cocreation process and experience that leads to a transaction. In this section, I will discuss the key elements of convenience, training, and relationship marketing; these three key elements can help bring an understanding to the role that the B & M store associate plays.

One of the primary roles of a retail store associate is to build the affirmation of perceived convenience (Gupta & Sharma, 2014). Gupta and Sharma identified six dimensions of convenience in the retail store environment: (a) search, (b) access, (c) selection, (d) assurance, (e) transaction, and (f) post-purchase. Of those six dimensions, assurance was noted as the most important element in the B & M store experience (Gupta & Sharma, 2014). A customer's interaction with a store associate is an important part of the buying process; this provides the customer with the reassurance they might need to help overcome fear and anxiety, helping to move the customer through the buying cycle faster. Reimers and Chao (2014) also studied the impacts of the customer's experience that lead to satisfaction; they found that convenience was the primary determinant for yielding a customer's satisfaction level. Not only is convenience an important part of the customer's shopping journey, convenience has become a catalyst for a satisfying shopping trip. This further reiterates the need for the retailer to create a convenient shopping experience and it is also a reminder that the level of convenience can be

influenced by the store associate.

Because store performance is closely connected to store associate training (Bao, Wei, & Chen, 2015), retail store managers may need to consider what types of training and investment they provide their store associates. Store associate training can cover a variety of topics, including the organization's policies and procedures, in-store technology and point-of-sale systems, and customer engagement (Silberman & Auerbach, 1998). Research has indicated that organizations that create standards and facilitate training that emphasizes customer engagement have experienced positive performance improvements by their store associates (Crowe & Bradshaw, 2016). These performance improvements help retail organizations in the short-term, but the training also plays a role in growing the leadership within the organization (Tan, Fu, & Yi, 2016).

Edeling and Pilz (2016) emphasized the need for associate training to focus on social competencies; while technical skills are important, there is a need for employees to focus their training efforts on developing social skills. The emphasis on social skills recommended by Edeling and Pilz plays an important role in the concept of value cocreation. Rasul (2018) indicated that customers consider participation and value cocreation to be key elements that create a stronger level of service quality. Further, Medberg and Heinonen (2014) emphasized the notion that a relationship exists over time; there is both a history and a future as it relates to the relational bond between a retailer and the consumer. For relationships to develop between the store associate and the customer, the store associate will need to possess the necessary social skills. By focusing on training that enhances store associates' social skills, B & M retailers have an

opportunity to leverage the future relational context and build upon that to further enhance their relationship with the customer.

Relationship marketing is another important aspect that the store associate helps bring to life in a B & M store (Rasul, 2018). This is where B & M can create a strong differentiation in the shopping experience when compared to e-commerce (France, Merrilees, & Miller, 2016). When shopping online, the customer has little involvement and interaction at a human level; there are some aspects, such as email, social proof, product reviews, and live chat, that help to bridge that relational gap, but there is no technology that fully replaces the emotional and human connection that an interaction with a human being creates. Because of this lack of replication in the digital world, relationship marketing and customer engagement continues to have strong ties to the physical store (Braun et al., 2017). Relationship marketing could be a viable solution for B & M retail store managers to help overcome the business problem that some B & M store managers have experienced by not having strategies that engage customers to shop at their B & M stores.

One of the key elements associated with relationship marketing is the concept of value cocreation (Rasul, 2018). Customer participation is a key element in the process of relationship marketing (Amorim, Rosa, & Santos, 2014); without the customer's involvement, the notion of relationship marketing does not exist. When customers interact with a B & M store associate and generate an emotional bond, they begin to trust each other and work together, by way of value cocreation, to make a level of service that did not previously exist. This level of value cocreation and emotional bond cannot yet be

found in the online shopping arena. This relationship and corresponding outcome create value for the customer and ultimately leads to profits for the business (Kumar, 2018). It is important to note that there is one distinct challenge associated with relationship marketing: It is difficult to measure the effectiveness and the associated outcomes with relationship marketing (Amorim et al., 2014). To help overcome this challenge, B & M retailers could leverage a robust customer relationship management tool to measure the lifetime value of the customer. This measurement could help the retailer understand the impact that relationship marketing has on the business. Fully leveraging the competitive advantages that B & M store associates can offer is a strategy that can help B & M retailers differentiate themselves in the market place. Using this strategy could help to drive incremental value through convenience, a strong knowledge base, and a rich customer experience.

Talent

Store associates who possess the appropriate skills to help create the experience for the customer provide an important element to consider. Staffing the team with the right talent could have an impact on the outcome of the customer's experience. It is more important to have the right talent in a B & M retail store than it is to simply have workers in the store (Damiani, Pompei, & Ricci, 2016). Having the right staff can be reduced to two primary elements: (a) hiring the right people, (b) paying reasonable wages, and (c) career advancement. The paragraphs to follow contain a discussion of each of these elements.

Hiring the right people to work in an organization is an important element to a

successful business (Showry & Manasa, 2016). Having the right talent in your organization can be helpful in generating a high-performing organization (Gotzsche-Astrup, 2018). As customers interact with B & M store associates, it is important that the customer have a quality interaction as that is the essence of the customer experience. If the store associate is ill-equipped or has a poor attitude, the store associate has the potential to negatively affect the customer's experience. Creating a negative customer experience can have long-term negative implications on the relationship between the customer and the brand (Amorim et al., 2014). The foundation of hiring the right people to facilitate the customer experience in a B & M retail store is a key component to creating a successful customer experience strategy for your customers (Showry & Manasa, 2016).

Understanding the concept of human interaction is also an important concept related to talent. Because B & M retail store associates work one-on-one with the customer, it is important to understand how the candidate interacts at a human level (Dobbs, 2016). When seeking to acquire talent, interviews and conversations should be conducted in-person so the interviewer can gain a sense of how a candidate might interact at a human level (Dobbs, 2016). Reed (2016) suggested that interviews should include some level of demonstration to allow the hiring manager to better understand how the candidate might present themselves in a given situation. To help further understand how a candidate might function in a larger setting, the hiring manager might consider conducting group interviews to help gain insight into how the candidate functions beyond the one-on-one setting and into a one-to-many setting (Reed, 2016). This approach of

group interviews may help the hiring manager to better understand how the candidate might operate in a collaborative work environment (Bussieres, Maiers, Grondin, & Brockhusen, 2017).

The second element relating to talent is the concept of paying reasonable wages. Cardiff-Hicks, Lafontaine, & Shaw (2015) found that higher wages attract higher qualified workers to the B & M retail sector. Damiani et al. (2016) further noted that performance-related pay leads to substantial growth in organizational efficiencies and enhancements. This concept that higher pay yields a better outcome in business is not a new concept in literature (Cardiff-Hicks, Lafontaine, & Shaw, 2015); intuitively, it makes complete sense: the more an organization pays, the higher their likelihood of attracting stronger candidates to their organization. Pertaining to the customer experience in a B & M retail store, attracting the right talent by paying an appropriate wage rate is an important consideration for aiding the in-store experience.

The third element in maintaining talent is the idea of creating career advancement for store associates. Career advancement is one of the most important elements for maintaining talent within an organization as it can be a powerful motivator for a store manager's staff (Schlechter & Bussin, 2015). Much research has been written regarding career advancement opportunities; in this section, I will focus on the following three elements that I found most prominent in the literature: clear goals, daily learning, and mentoring. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss each of these three concepts.

Creating clear goals and building an effective development plan for each store associate that aligns to the organization's needs is an important point of alignment for an

employee and an employer (Hunt, Langowitz, Rollag, & Hebert-Maccaro, 2017). It is important for the store manager to understand the store associates' background, including education, work history, and professional accomplishments (Ragan, 2018). This type of information creates a guide for the store manager to build upon. Once this guide has been created, the store manager, alongside the store associate, can begin to look forward to what the store associate would like to accomplish in their career. This would include an attempt to understand where the store associate's goals might intersect with the organization's goals. Assuming the store associate's goals intersect with the organization's goals, the store manager can work to identify a clear area of developmental focus for the associate. This is when the greatest amount of satisfaction occurs for both the store associate and the store manager (Hunt, Langowitz, Rollag, & Hebert-Maccaro, 2017).

Daily learning is also an important component to helping create career advancement opportunities for store associates (Jovcheska, 2017). Daily learning is the idea of looking for learning opportunities everywhere; in every interaction, every situation, and every conversation. A good example of this would be a store manager asking a series of questions of a store associate following an interaction with a customer; these questions might include: what did you learn from that interaction, how can those learnings be applied to your current role, and how could you enhance the customer experience for the next customer with whom you interact? The goal of these types of questions would be to enable near real-time learning and development for the store associate. Being able to grow, adapt, and learn are important characteristics for store

associates to create career advancement opportunities (Pascadi & Scarlat, 2016). This type of steady feedback and adaptation could help the store associate to get marginally better and create a better customer experiences with each customer interaction. Daily learning could allow the store associate to grow more quickly in their skill set and therefore, create more potential career advancement opportunities (Jovcheska, 2017).

The third and final aspect relating to career advancement opportunities for store associates is the idea of mentoring. Mentoring is the notion of having a more tenured individual, known as a mentor, provide guidance to a less tenured individual, known as a mentee. The mentor becomes a role model, sharing their knowledge, experience, skills, and expertise with the mentee (Boeren et al., 2015). This is done to invest in and help grow the mentee for future career advancement opportunities, and to also help create long-term benefit for the organization (Dyrberg & Michelsen, 2017). For the store associate, the mentee, there are several beneficial elements. Being paired with a mentor could allow the store associate to see varying types of skills and abilities, allowing them to learn and grow in ways that they might not have considered. This also has the potential to create a sense of renewal and enthusiasm with the store associate; by having another individual come alongside them, the store associate may feel more important and more invested in the organization (Boswell, Stark, Wilson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2017). As the mentee matures, this process becomes replicable for the organization, providing a steady stream of mentors that are available to help grow and encourage store associates along their career journey. In addition to the benefits for the mentee, there are benefits for the mentor as well. By working in the mentor capacity, that individual may gain additional

management skills, listening skills, problem-solving skills, and communication skills (Boeren et al., 2015). Growth in these types of skills is mutually beneficial for the mentee and for the mentor as this could help both individuals with potential career advancement. In addition to benefits for the mentee and the mentor, organizations could also receive benefit from this type of partnership. The benefits may include a higher level of productivity from the workforce, a reduction in employee turnover, and a stronger and larger pool of potential future managers for organizations (Boswell et al., 2017). A well-developed mentoring program has the potential to help with career advancement opportunities for store associates, as well as help organizations create a more sustainable business model.

Considering the CDL framework, the concept of talent and skilled labor ties directly into cocreation of value. Without the right level of store associate talent to fuel the in-store experience, the store associate cannot generate high levels of participation with the customer. A strong customer experience is generated when participation and cocreation are key elements in the exchange between the store associate and the customer (Rasul, 2018). Having strong talent, which is comprised of hiring the right talent, paying reasonable wages, and career advancement opportunity, is an essential element of creating a strong engagement strategy within a B & M retail environment.

Transition and Summary

As online shopping continues to grow (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017), customers have fewer reasons to shop in a traditional B & M store location. This customer behavior has led to a decline in revenue at B & M store locations. To help overcome this

phenomenon, retail store managers should consider strategies that engage customers to shop at their B & M stores. There are several elements discussed in the literature review that could have an impact on the customer's experience within a B & M shopping environment. Value cocreation is a theme that emerged in several places within the literature; it can be seen within CDL, in-store technology, relationship marketing, consumer behavior, the store associate, and talent. Within the literature review, I found that value cocreation has a direct relationship to the strategies that retail store managers could use to engage customers to shop in their B & M stores.

Section 1 of this study included the defined research problem, purpose of my research, and a review of the academic literature. In Section 2, I will discuss the research methodology, design, and sampling strategy. I will discuss how I captured the data, how I maintained high levels of ethics in my research, and how I analyzed the data points. In Section 3, I will present my research findings, applications for professional practice, recommendations for action, and implications for social change.

Section 2: The Project

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that retail store managers used to engage customers to shop at their B & M stores. The target population consisted of five retail store managers from the state of Texas who have experienced increases in revenue in their B & M stores. This sample was appropriate for this study because some B & M retailers have experienced positive financial results by enhancing customers' in-store experiences (see Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). The implications for positive social change could include the potential to enhance the economic vitality and development in the surrounding community by creating additional jobs and by generating additional money that could be spent in the local economy.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to prepare the interview questions, conduct the interviews, and record the data in an accurate manner (see Fusch & Ness, 2015). I used a qualitative multiple case study design; this approach allowed me to use interviews to gain experiential information from the participants. I leveraged my existing network as a method of recruitment to gain access to the participants; this was similar to the approach used by Rothausen, Henderson, Arnold, and Malshe (2017). Regarding the defining of boundaries between practice and research, I found that there were no conflicts with how I collected data from the retail store managers. None of the participants were my subordinates, nor did they report through my chain of command. Participation from the retail store managers was voluntary and the participants had the option to opt out at any

point during the study process. To further protect the participants, I excluded their names and the company name in the publication of this study. To mitigate bias, I used an interview protocol described by Van de Wiel (2017) to help maintain constancy and structure between the interviews. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix A. I also used member checking to help mitigate bias. Member checking is the process of validating the data collected during the interview by the participants (Koelsch, 2013). Cope (2014) used a similar method of member checking to help mitigate research bias. Following each interview, I asked the participant to review the captured themes for accuracy.

Participants

The participants for this study were retail store managers who worked for Company A in the state of Texas and who have demonstrated successful strategies for engaging customers to shop at their B & M stores. I gained access to these participants through my professional network (see Hoyland, Hollund, & Olsen, 2015). I contacted the participants via phone to establish a working relationship and introduce the participants to the study. I did not have previous contact with these participants through Company A. This was a similar approach used by Pract (2014). This approach allowed me to maintain the accepted practices of research, which include remaining unbiased, being aware of preconceptions, discussing the interpretation of the data with others, and confirming my interpretations with the participants as described by Mercer et al. (2017).

Research Method

A qualitative research methodology was used for this study. Qualitative

methodology is used to gain an understanding of experiences (Alase, 2017). This qualitative methodology was appropriate because it allowed me to gain insight into the experiences that customers prefer while shopping at B & M locations. Cairney and St. Denny (2015) indicated that the qualitative methodology is most appropriate for studying social phenomena that cannot be easily quantified. Using the qualitative methodology, I explored the various experiences that customers were offered in B & M stores (see Fusch & Ness, 2015). Since my study was about the B & M store experience, a quantitative methodology was not appropriate because such experiences cannot be reduced to statistical data (see Hussein, 2015). I did not use a mixed methods design to analyze trends relating to the revenue outcomes for each of the B & M stores. Using a mixed methods design would have allowed me to understand correlations in customer behavior and the revenue impacts they have for the B & M store (see Lewis, 2015). However, store level revenue data was not publicly available, so I did not have access to this type of quantitative data to include alongside the qualitative data generated in the retail store manager interviews.

Research Design

I used a multiple case study design for this research. The designs I considered for this study were narrative research, phenomenological research, ethnographic research, and case study research. Narrative research provides a life perspective from the participants (Humphrey, 2014) but would not have been appropriate for this study because telling a story from past experiences may not be relevant. The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of the participants within their current retail organization.

Phenomenological research provides a summary of the conscious lived experiences of the participants (Gergen et al., 2015). Past experiences would not have provided insights regarding the retailer's strategies that I was seeking in this study and therefore were not relevant. Ethnographic research focuses on identifying self-defined beliefs and behaviors within a group (Edberg et al., 2015). Because my study was not focused on identifying trends in specific cultures or societies and, because participants vary across cultural groups, an ethnographic design was not appropriate for this study. A case study research design is used to identify patterns and build explanations from the collected information (Lewis, 2015). A single case study focuses on a single issue, whereas a multiple case study looks at multiple cases to understand the differences and similarities between them (Lewis, 2015). I was researching strategies that have helped retail store managers engage customers to shop at their B & M stores. The most appropriate research design for my study was a multiple case study design. To achieve data saturation, I needed at least five interviews (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2015). I was able to achieve data saturation with the five interviews. If I had been unable to reach data saturation, I would have continued to conduct interviews until data saturation occurred. Once I reached the point in my interviews where the data collected became redundant and offer no new information, I knew I had achieved data saturation (see Palinkas, Horwitz, & Green, 2015).

Population and Sampling

The retail store managers from Company A in the state of Texas was the population I used for this study. Purposeful sampling was used for this study. Purposeful

sampling is a nonprobability sampling method and can be used when a researcher is focused on a particular set of characteristics within a sample (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling can be helpful when conducting interviews (Abdulai & Shafiwu, 2014). Using purposeful sampling allowed me to focus on the specific characteristics of the retail store managers. Retail store managers from different store formats with varying volume at Company A were represented to gain different viewpoints from the different types of stores; this allowed me to gain broad viewpoints from each store type (see Karimi Moonaghi, Ranjbar, Heydari, & Scurlock-Evans, 2015). In addition to the criteria of varying volume, I also selected those retail store managers who are actively using a customer engagement strategy. The interviews took place at the retail store manager's office; this approach allowed me to create the least amount of distraction for the business.

Data saturation is important as it is an indicator of the accuracy of the data (Palinkas et al., 2015). To achieve data saturation in a multiple case study design, I needed at least five interviews (see Malterud et al., 2015). I was able to achieve data saturation with the five interviews. If I had been unable to reach data saturation, I would have continued to conduct interviews until data saturation occurred. Once I reached the point in my interviews where no new information was being gathered, I knew I had achieved data saturation (see Palinkas et al., 2015).

Ethical Research

Maintaining the highest standards of ethics in my research was my top priority. To focus on the highest quality of research, I avoided the primary moral pitfalls of research, as described by Honig, Lampel, Siegel, and Drnevich (2014), of research

misconduct, plagiarism, and falsification (Honig et al., 2014). To help maintain these moral principles, I adhered to research protocols that included

- Participants must consent to the interview.
- Participants have the right to discontinue at any point in the research process. Once the participant has expressed their desire to withdraw from the study, I will eliminate the data collected from the participant.
- Participant's identity and any identifying information will remain confidential; all personal data collected during the interview process will remain confidential.
- All collected data will be saved under username and password for 5 years.

I used consenting adults as participants in the data collection process. This was a similar approach used by Resnik (2015). At any point in the process, the participants could have discontinued their participation in the study; this could have been accomplished through an email or a phone call from the participant, or verbally during the interview. This was the same participant discontinuation approach used by Kaye et al. (2015). The participants did not receive any form of incentive before or after the interviews in exchange for their participation. This was a similar approach to the study conducted by Resnik (2015). The participants were aware of the study, and I plan to share the findings of the study with each participant; this was a similar approach used by Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Khoshnava Fomani, and Ali Cheraghi (2014). I provided each participant with a copy of the consent form before the interview so that they understood their rights and the confidentiality of the agreement. In order to maintain participant

confidentially, I recorded the data by using a participant number rather than their name. The participant name and corresponding participant number was maintained in a singular reference document. All data collected will be stored in a secure location for 5 years. The IRB approval number for this study is 08-27-18-0701525 and expires on August 26, 2019.

Data Collection Instruments

I collected data by using a multiple case study research design by conducting semistructured interviews. Truman, Mason, and Venter (2017) used semistructured interviews to determine a model for retail experiential learning. Similarly, Chapman and Sadd (2014) used semistructured interviews to gain an understanding of how scheduled events in shopping centers can impact foot traffic and sales performance. Cridland, Caputi, Jones, and Magee (2015) suggested that semistructured interviews were a beneficial data collection method when attempting to understand the dynamics of a situation. Therefore, I used semistructured interviews to explore strategies that retail store managers have used to engage customers to shop at their B & M stores.

In addition to semistructured interviews, I used observational notes to enrich the collected data. This is similar to the method used by Cope (2014). My observational notes contained additional information, such as the participant's body language or my reflection of the interaction with the participant. According to Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), observational notes can help researchers remember important details that occurred during their interviews.

I was the primary investigator. According to Lewis (2015), qualitative researchers

are the primary investigators in semistructured interviews. Similar to the study conducted by Karimi Moonaghi et al. (2015), these interviews consisted of open-ended questions that allowed me to capture information from the participants and then code their thoughts into common themes. Appendix A contains the interview protocol and Appendix B contains the interview questions. After conducting the interviews, I then conducted a thematic analysis of the data and calculated the frequencies of the themes to determine the most important factors (Hampton, Rabagliati, Sorace, & Fletcher-Watson, 2017).

In addition to conducting the interviews, I used member checking and observational notes to provide data triangulation. I provided a summary of each interview to the participant following the interviews for member checking. Member checking is the process of validating the data collected during the interview by the participants (Koelsch, 2013). This review of the collected data during member checking ensures the researcher has captured an accurate representation of participants' responses (Cope, 2014; Morse, 2015). My observational notes contained additional information such as the participant's body language or my reflection of the interaction with the participant. According to Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), observational notes can help researchers remember important details that occurred during their interviews.

Data Collection Technique

I collected data by interviewing retail store managers. I used an audio recorder to record the interviews and conversations and utilized the data from these interviews as part of the data collection process; this was a standard process for collecting data through an interview (see Miller, 2016). I conducted the interviews in-person rather than via a

phone call, similar to the structure used by Karimi Moonaghi et al. (2015), to help me better assess the participants' body language. The interview questions were designed to help me answer the research question in my study: What strategies do retail store managers use to engage customers to shop at their B & M stores? The interviews were semistructured open-ended questions, allowing me to collect data while attempting to understand the dynamics of the situation (see Cridland et al., 2015). I adhered to the interview protocol outlined in Appendix A and used follow-up questions when necessary for clarity (see Van de Wiel, 2017). The interview protocol allowed me to maintain consistency across the various interviews by following a described workflow; this workflow included an introduction and definition of the project, a list of detailed questions to ask the participant, a wrap-up statement, and a reminder to schedule a follow-up with the participant for member checking.

Similar to the validation process used by Morse (2015), I used member checking to ensure I had appropriately captured the themes in my interviews. I also maintained observational notes to help provide any additional insights from my study as they helped me remember important details that occurred during the interviews; this was a similar technique described by Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018). These observational notes were also part of my data organization technique.

Data collection by interview can offer both advantages and disadvantages to the researcher. One of the primary advantages of using interviews for data collection is the concept of invoking reality (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Invoking reality is a way to get the participant to respond to the interview questions in the form of telling a story. This story

telling allows the researcher to have a better understanding of the exact experience of the participant. The primary disadvantage to data collection by interview is the fact that it is time-consuming due to the back-and-forth dialog (Alshenqeeti, 2014). This type of research involves is a significant amount of time investment from both the researcher and the participant.

Data Organization Technique

I recorded the interviews via an audio recorder (see Miller, 2016). I then transcribed the recordings into a Word document. Both the audio recordings and the transcribed documents have been saved and backed up on Dropbox for redundancy; Bernauer (2015) noted that this was a common process for data organization. During the interviews, I took notes that described my observations. I then analyzed the transcripts, using a thematic analysis process, identifying common themes and calculating the frequencies in which those themes occur; this was similar to a process used by Hampton et al. (2017). This thematic analysis was noted and calculated in an Excel workbook. The Excel workbook has also been saved and backed up on Dropbox for redundancy. Each of these files will be saved for 5 years.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the transcribed interviews for common themes in the participants' responses (see Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). I used a thematic analysis technique to group and code the responses into themes (see Hampton et al., 2017). After coding the data in Excel, I removed unrelated data and evaluated the information using a traditional data analysis method as described by Moustakas (1994). The traditional data analysis

method includes reviewing the information with an unbiased approach; using phenomenological reduction, which includes creating themes and descriptions; and imaginative variation, which will be used to deduce the elements of the experiences (see Moustakas, 1994). I then created descriptions from my interpretation of the data and presented the findings in Section 3 of this study. In addition to using the thematic analysis, I also utilized my observational notes to ensure I have captured all relevant data as described by Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018). I also utilized member checking (see Koelsch, 2013); I provided each participant with a themed synopsis of our interview and asked them to validate the accuracy of how I captured their responses. In addition to the data analysis method described above, I also augmented the data with my observational notes that included any observations that I may have noted during the interviews. This was a similar approach that Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) used in their study. The use of observational notes, as well as member checking, are methods I employed to provide data triangulation.

As I identified the themes from the data, I used the primary components of the CDL framework as a lens by which to interpret the data and as a data organization function. The primary components of CDL that I used for data organization are business perspective, customer logic, offering, value formation, and customer ecosystem (Heinonen et al., 2010).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are of the utmost importance to my study. To obtain reliability, I focused on data dependability and triangulation. To obtain validity in my

study, I utilized the concepts of transferability and confirmability. In the sections to follow, I will discuss how I achieved reliability and validity in my study.

Reliability

I sought to maintain reliability through dependability. Morse (2015) stated that reliability could be achieved through dependability and triangulation. Because the company used in my study, Company A, is a large retailer and has many business objectives that change with the needs of the customer, the findings of my study should maintain dependability over time. Because my interview questions are not focused on a specific company initiative, the findings should be dependable. To test the dependability of my study, I would need to replicate the interviews in a similar setting (see Cope, 2014). To accomplish this, I maintained detailed notes and a description of the study so that it can be replicated and tested for dependability (see Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). I also utilized member checking as a means of creating dependability. Member checking is the process of validating the data collected during the interview by the participants (Koelsch, 2013). This review of the collected data helped to ensure the researcher has captured an accurate representation of participants' responses (see Morse, 2015).

Validity

Validity and credibility of research are based on the principle that the findings are plausible (Gordon & Patterson, 2013). Because I am using interview data in my study, the participants helped to determine the credibility. To help maintain validity and credibility, I asked the participants to provide their opinion of their level of credibility associated with their point of view; according to Cope (2014), this type of interaction

with the interview participants can help improve credibility. As I collect data, I looked for the reoccurrence of actions or behaviors across the data to help maintain credibility in my study; this was similar to a process used by Fusch and Ness (2015) to help maintain credibility in their study. As described by Alshenqeti (2014), interviews were among the most commonly used in qualitative research. I used interviews as my method for collecting data because of the common use this method amongst these types of studies that collect behavioral data.

To help ensure that transferability exists within my study, I maintained detailed notes and documentation relating to my interviews; this was a similar practice used by Morse (2015). The limitation in transferability in my study was geography; because my research was conducted in one state within the United States, transferability of my study could be limited outside of the state of Texas.

Confirmability is the level of objectivity associated with my study (see Morse, 2015). It is important that I, as the researcher and data collection tool, remain self-critical in all aspects of the research (see Elo et al., 2014). Because I am employed by Company A, I took several precautions to ensure validity. First, I had not previously met any study participants; there was no personal bias with the person I was interviewing. Second, I adhered to data analysis process previously outlined in this section because using this standard has led to validity in previous studies (see Cope, 2014).

Data saturation also helped to ensure validity in my study (see Palinkas et al., 2015). I needed at least five interviews to achieve data saturation (see Malterud et al., 2015). I achieved data saturation in my study as I reach the point where no new

information was being gathered (see Palinkas et al., 2015). If I had not reached data saturation after the initial five interviews, I would have continued to conduct interviews until I had reached data saturation.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I defined the design of the study and the research method. I further defined the participants and the sampling tactics that I utilized. I provided details about data collection, techniques, and analysis. I also discussed how I ensured credibility, dependability, and transferability for my study. In Section 3, I will discuss the findings of my research and the implications for business and social change.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that retail store managers use to engage customers to shop at their B & M stores. I collected data using semistructured interviews and purposeful sampling. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Moustaka's (1994) thematic analysis method. The primary themes I identified are as follows: fun at work, customer connection, relationship, pride, and genuine care.

Presentation of the Findings

This exploratory multiple case study consisted of five retail store managers from North Texas at Company A. The five participants agreed to the study by signing the interview consent form. I collected data using semistructured interviews and an audio recorder to capture the conversations. The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do B & M store managers use to engage customers to shop at their B & M stores? I transcribed the interviews and organized the responses in Excel. A summary of the interviews was provided to the participants for member checking. I then analyzed the data and listed the emerging themes from each of the questions. Using a thematic analysis process, I outlined the factors that indicated a contribution to successful customer engagement strategies for shopping at B & M stores.

Multiple steps were included in the thematic analysis. I first coded the data using Moustaka's (1994) thematic analysis method; that process includes identifying and recording the relevant themes in the data, removing the unrelated data, and grouping the

themes into categories. Using those categories, I created descriptions that identified the themes in those categories and noted the frequency with which they occurred in the data set.

The following are the steps I used in the thematic analysis: (a) listing and grouping themes, (b) removing unrelated data, (c) grouping and combining similar themes, and (d) creating theme descriptions. The experiences described by the participants were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Excel and the thematic analysis process. I also used my observational notes and member checking to ensure data triangulation and reliability, a similar process to the one used by Morse (2015). My observational notes consisted of approximately one hour of customer and associate observation with the store environments following each interview. In these notes, I captured behavioral observations that confirmed the themes that I heard in the store manager interviews. The use of observational notes, in conjunction with member checking, are methods I employed to provide data triangulation. This was a similar approach that Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) used in their study.

The primary themes I identified were fun at work, customer connection, relationship, pride, and genuine care. The themes that I identified in my study were significant factors that contributed to successful customer engagement strategies for Company A. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that retail store managers use to engage customers to shop at their B & M stores.

As I approached this study, I expected that I would hear the concepts of tools and training to be fundamental to the in-store customer experience. For tools, I had expected

to hear ideas about the use of technology in-store or tablets to aid in the experience. This could have been tools that allowed the store associates to see more environmental and end-use photography or how-to videos. I was expecting to hear that store associates needed more digital content delivered via tools to help bring the customer experience to life. For training, I had expected to hear ideas about course material and week-long training classes. To my surprise, those were not the main themes. The themes I heard were more focused on engagement between the store associate and the customer. Those themes were centered around the concepts of fun at work, customer connection, relationship, pride, and genuine care. While I was surprised to see these themes emerge, they each aligned with the framework of the CDL; each of these themes placed the customer at the center of each interaction. In the paragraphs to follow, I will describe each of the themes as well as discuss how these themes align with the CDL.

Strategy 1: Fun at Work

The most prominent strategy that emerged in my research was the idea of fun at work. Many of the store managers attributed their successful customer engagement strategies to the root idea of their store associates first having fun. Having fun at work was a component of the individual store culture and is something that was established at the manager level and this then cascaded down throughout the remaining members of the organization. Of the five store managers interviewed, four of them indicated that this was the primary strategy driving a successful customer experience in-store. Participant 1 stated that “having fun is what I have been most successful with in terms of customer experience.” This idea of fun at work manifested itself by playing upbeat music, dancing

in the store, laughing at the various situations, and finding a way to remain happy and pleasant even though the team was doing laborious work. Participant 4 stated that “if my store associates are having fun, they have a higher rate of interaction with the customer and that interaction is more pleasant for the customer and results in higher levels of sales productivity.” As I observed the store associates and their interaction with the customers, I could see they were both having fun; because the store associates were happy and cheerful, the customers gravitated towards them and would adopt a similar attitude of happiness and cheerfulness. In my observational notes, I indicated that shopping was not a chore or a task for customers at these stores, but it was a time where they had fun and enjoyed the level of attention they were given by the store associates.

Strategy 2: Customer Connection

Another strategy that emerged was connection with the customer. Participant 3 described this as “using nonselling conversation to connect with the customer.” Rather than having that store associate go straight to selling a product, the store associate will attempt to connect with the customer by learning about a project they might be working on at home or understand what might have brought them into the store that day. From there, the store associate will build on that connection and tie the selling aspect into the conversation. This approach helps to create a higher level of comfort with the customer, allowing them to become more engaged with the store associate. Participant 4 stated that they “get personal information from the customer by looking at pictures of projects their working on; it’s spending true, honest time with the customer.” Creating a more personal

connection with the customer leads to a better and richer conversation that allows the two participants to more quickly find ways help the customer fulfill their needs.

An example of this that emerged from the semistructured interviews was a description from Participant 5 of a conversation between a customer and a store associate. In this description, a customer entered the store and was greeted by a store associate. Rather than the store associate telling the customer about the promotions that were happening that day, the store associate greeted the customer and began asking the customer what brought them into the store. Through that exchange, the store associate discovered that the customer was shopping for their son as he was preparing to go to college for his freshman year. The store associate was able to relate by sharing the time their son went to college. This connection with the customer seemed to help the customer relax and become more receptive to the help that the store associate was providing. This type of personal connection with the customer led to a rich conversation, which allowed the store associate to find ways to help the customer and to fulfill their needs.

Strategy 3: Relationship

The strategy of building trust and relationships with the customer emerged from my research as well. This concept builds on connection and conversation with the customer by maintaining that level of engagement over a prolonged period of time. Participant 4 shared several stories of customers coming in with their spouses just to meet one of the store associates with whom they had a relationship. The bond between the customer and store associate fosters a deep level of trust that enriches the customer experience, both in the present and in the future. This level of relationship is built by

having a store associate spend time with the customer. It is not a bond that is formed in a single encounter; it takes time to develop and mature.

In my time of observation at Participant 4's store, I saw this first-hand. A customer entered the store with a small dog in her arms; she had just been next door at the dog groomer. The customer stopped in Participant 4's store so the store associate that helped the customer last week while shopping could meet the customer's dog. This customer knew the associate's name and interacted with her as if they were good friends. After an 8-minute conversation between the customer and the store associate, the customer left the store, not having purchased anything in that visit. After the customer left, I asked the store associate about the customer; the store associate indicated that the customer is one of the "regular customers" that frequent their store. The store associate further added that they had also met the customer's spouse in the past few weeks as well. This is the type of behavior that indicates a strong relational bond between the store associate and the customer; this is the type of relationship that cannot be created in one visit to the store but over a prolonged period. This type of relationship takes work on the store associate's part and is developed and matured over a longer period.

Strategy 4: Pride

Participant 2 described pride as drawing a parallel to their store as their home:

The analogy that I use is when you shop at my store, it's like you come into my house. If these customers were guests in your house, how would you treat them?

Using this approach helps to create pride for our associates; they make it personal.

The level of hospitality and pride that the store associates take in their personal life spill over into the store they manage. Fostering pride can be difficult. Participant 4 described the method used for building pride in their store associates:

To create pride in our associates, we involve them in the ‘why’; it’s not just about telling them what to do, it’s about bringing them along on the journey of why we’re doing it. Providing them with a deeper understanding of why creates buy-in and fosters pride for the associate.

The sense of pride that these store managers and store associates had seemed to help elevate the customer’s experience in-store.

In my observational notes, I saw this element of pride emerge as well. On several occasions across the various participants, I observed the store associates using their downtime between customers to tidy the store. Without having specific direction from the store managers to clean and straighten the store sales floor, the store associates seemed to have enough pride to take that upon themselves. They would pick up small pieces of trash from the floor or fixtures and they would straighten the shelves to ensure the product presentation was as neat as could be. This was another point of validation that the store associates took pride in how their store looked and understood that they have an impact on the customer’s experience.

Strategy 5: Genuine Care

The final strategy that emerged from the collected data was the concept of genuine care. Participant 2 said, “it’s not just a job for us; we actually care about our customers. When we have an interaction with our customer, we are genuinely listening

and care about what they have to say.” This concept ties into a few of the other strategies previously discussed; mainly, customer connection and relationship. Because the store associate cares about the customer, this leads to a deeper connection and relationship with the customer. Participant 5 said, “we interact with the customer because we care about the customer; we genuinely want to make a difference in their life.” The concept of genuine care seemed to help more quickly cultivate a strong relationship between the customer and the store associate.

Similar trends emerged from my observational notes as well; on multiple occasions, I observed the store associates spending time listening to customers and then responding to their needs. In one particular observation, I saw the store associate not only listening to the customer but responding to the customer with follow-up questions to obtain more details of the customer’s needs. This idea of active listening and proactive response to the customer is an indicator that the store associate genuinely cares about the need that the customer is there to fulfill.

Conceptual Framework: Consumer-Dominant Value Creation Logic

The conceptual framework I used in this study was CDL; it is a concept based on the idea that businesses should focus on customers rather than on products, services, or systems (Heinonen et al., 2010). Strandvik et al. (2012) stated that when businesses put the customer first, all other aspects of doing businesses fall into place. The CDL framework describes the customer at the center of all interactions (Finne & Gronroos, 2017). Each of the identified themes from the data I collected point directly back to the CDL; all of the themes are centered around an interaction with the customer.

After having conducted the study, it is clear that the CDL was an appropriate framework for my study. Prior to collecting the data, I assumed that these store associates were going to fail to put the customer at the center of the transaction; I assumed that they would be relying on tools, technology, or training. To my surprise, these store associates were putting the customer first, placing them at the center of the interaction rather than relying on tools or technology. The strategies identified were focused on engagement between the store associate and the customer. While I was surprised to see these five strategies emerge, they each aligned with the CDL framework as they placed the customer at the center of each interaction.

Online vs. In-Store

Question 5 in my interview questions was specifically designed to understand what type of in-store customer experiences could not be replicated in a digital or online space. I assumed that I would hear responses about the tangibility of the product; in an online environment, the customer cannot touch, feel, or smell the product. While I did hear those types of responses, there were a few themes that emerged that are worthy of discussion. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the themes of real-time feedback, instant gratification, and conversation.

First, real-time feedback stood out as a differentiator between online and in-store engagement. In the online channel, an editorial or a video on a website can show a customer how to create a floral arrangement for a customer. In that online engagement, the website has no understanding of how the customer is responding or reacting to the presentation of the floral arrangement. In an in-store environment, the associate can

receive real-time feedback from the customer, allowing the store associate to alter components of the presentation to meet the customer's specific needs. In the example of the floral arrangement, the associate could receive feedback from the customer regarding one of the colors in the arrangement; with that real-time feedback, the store associate could make a change to the presentation and get more feedback from the customer. This level of real-time feedback is difficult to generate online.

The second differentiator that stood out between online and in-store engagement was the theme of instant gratification. In the online space, many retailers offer a form of expedited shipping. Amazon.com, for example, offers same-day delivery on many items (Ma, 2017). Even with expedited shipping options, the customer will have to wait for the product to arrive when ordering from an online channel. In-store purchases, however, do offer instant gratification. When you buy a product in-store, in most cases, you have the option of taking the product home with you that day. In-store purchasing offers a differentiator from the online channel in that it offers instant gratification for the customer.

The final theme that differentiates B & M stores from the online channel is conversation. Some retail websites offer the ability for a customer to use a chat function, allowing them to engage with an associate in the customer service group. While this does offer a means for the customer to communicate with an individual, it can be slow and create challenges in the levels of communication. An in-store experience is differentiated from online by offering a humanize level of communication. It's often easier to communicate a customer's need via a verbal form of communication rather than the

written word, and the in-person response is real-time as opposed to the delay that often exists with the online chat functionality. Additionally, in-person communication allows for the comprehension of verbal queues; those verbal queues are not represented in an online chat function. These three themes, real-time feedback, instant gratification, and conversation emerged from the data I collected as clear differentiators between in-store and online.

While these three themes of real-time feedback, instant gratification, and conversation emerged as differentiators for shopping in a B & M store, there are several benefits that customers receive from having the option to shop online; those benefits include convenience, a broader assortment, and product reviews. Convenience has been noted as the primary factor for customers choosing to shop online rather than in-store (Bhagat, 2015). It is often faster for the customer to buy a product online than it is to travel to the physical store to make a purchase (Lai, Ulhas, & Lin, 2014). Another benefit to shopping online compared to a B & M retail store is assortment size. A B & M retailer has limited space and this constraint often means that retailers only stock items that have a high velocity of sales. Online retailers, in comparison, online retailers have few retail space constraints and can offer a broader assortment (Ma, 2016). The final benefit to shopping online compared to a B & M retail store is product reviews. Online retailers that make product reviews available to their customers often experience a higher level of commitment, which leads to a purchase (Tamimi & Sebastianelli, 2015).

In this section, I have discussed the differentiators between online shopping and shopping in-store. The themes that emerged as differentiators for those customers while

shopping in-store were real-time feedback, instant gratification, and conversation. The themes that emerged as differentiators for those customers while shopping online were convenience, a broader assortment, and product reviews. To help bridge the gap between the experiences, online retailers should consider attempting to bring those in-store differentiators to life online and B & M retailers should consider attempting to bring those online differentiators to life in-store.

Measurement of Strategies

Two dominant concepts emerged that related to measuring the various strategies used by the retail store managers; one directly tied to the sales performance in a quantitative fashion and another qualitative view based on customer behavior and feedback. Each retail store manager used each of these types of measurements in isolation while some used them in conjunction with one another. Looking first at sales performance, this type of measurement is more easily accessible and quantifiable based upon exceeding a forecast or exceeding last year's performance. Participant 5 was only looking at sales performance to measure the effectiveness of their customer engagement strategies; it was assumed to be an effective strategy if the store exceeded their sales forecast. However, it wasn't directly correlated to the customer experience strategy as it could have been influenced by other factors such as promotions and product availability. For this reason, a more qualitative approach to measurement could prove to be a more accurate representation of effectiveness.

Participants 1 and 3 were using a more qualitative approach to measurement by using various types of customer feedback to measure their strategies. Some of the retail

store managers were using a more formal process of soliciting customer feedback, primarily through the use of post-purchase surveys. In this method, customers could provide their feedback on specific elements of their experience while shopping in store. There were also the open-ended text forms that allowed the customer to provide more details that the customer wasn't able to provide via the structured questions. In addition to the structured surveys, some of the retail store managers used less scientific means for collecting customer feedback for measurement. In some instances, the retail store managers would simply ask customers for feedback regarding their experience as they were leaving the store. In many instances, the feedback provided by the customers was not solicited from the store managers; the customer was so happy with the experiences, they felt the need to seek out the managers and share the details of their experiences.

Findings Confirmed in Existing Literature

An enhanced customer experience has led some B & M retailers to experience positive financial results (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). Some B & M retail store managers have not embraced the customer first mentality. Strandvik, et al. (2012) indicated that businesses that put the customer first often experience positive financial results. The participants in this study indicated the importance that customer experience plays in the potential transaction that the customer is attempting to conduct as well as the future business that the customer might conduct with the retailer. Another important element identified in the literature related to customer experience is relationship marketing; Rasul (2018) indicated that store associates help bring the shopping experience to life. Relationship marketing and customer experience can create a strong differentiation in the

B & M shopping experience (France et al., 2016). The findings in this study are confirmed by the existing literature relating to customer experience.

Applications to Professional Practice

There were multiple themes identified in this study that could play a role in enhancing the customer experience while shopping in a B & M store. Understanding and leveraging these concepts that assist the retail store manager could have positive implications to the professional practice of B & M retail. The themes identified in this study are fun at work, customer connection, relationship, pride, and genuine care; all of these factors could be concepts that a retail store manager uses in their customer engagement strategies. This study adds to the existing body of work relating to customer engagement strategies and provides the B & M retail profession with additional resources to further drive sales. In addition to adding to the existing literature, there were new themes discovered that were not readily found in the existing literature including the ideas of customer connection, pride, and genuine care.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study have the potential to create positive social change for B & M retail organization managers who are seeking new strategies to enhance the customer experience in their stores. By creating an enhanced customer engagement strategy, B & M retailers could see increases in customer purchases and subsequently, revenue. Additionally, an enhanced customer engagement strategy could lead to higher customer retention rates and a higher customer lifetime value as the retail store manager builds a deeper relationship with the customer; an increase in lifetime customer value

translates to more revenue for the B & M retailer. The implications for positive social change include the potential to enhance the economic vitality and development in the surrounding community by creating additional jobs, and by generating additional money that could be spent in the local economy.

Recommendations for Action

There are several factors that have the potential to assist B & M retail store managers in building a customer engagement strategy. Based upon the findings in this study, I recommend that B & M retail store managers consider the use of these identified strategies to develop and enhance their customer engagement strategies. Creating and implementing customer engagement strategies can have positive impacts on the business (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015). Outlined in this study are 5 customer engagement strategies that retail store managers at Company A have used successfully; the recommendation is for B & M retail store managers to experiment and test 1 or more of these identified strategies with their customers to find out which, if any, resonate and create an enhanced customer experience. Many different types of B & M retailers should leverage these findings. These recommendations will be shared directly with Company A but will also be shared at several retail conferences in the future.

Recommendations for Further Research

There was little research written about the customer experience within B & M retail stores. There is a need for more research to be conducted on this topic; the need for more research includes other geographic areas and other companies. I recommend that further research be conducted from the customer's point of view rather than the point of

view of the retailer. Additional research from the customer's point of view in combination with the point of view of the retailer could help to add additional insights into the most effective customer engagement strategies. Replicating this study at a future point in time may yield different results as customer engagement strategies change over time.

One of the limitations noted in this study was retail store manager talent. The skill level of the retail store manager was outside of the control of the researcher, but it could have an influence on their level of engagement with a customer. Additional research could be conducted that is specific to the various levels of talent within a B & M retail store to understand how that might impact the customer engagement strategies.

Reflections

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that retail store managers use to engage customers to shop at their B & M stores. There were 5 store managers interviewed in the North Texas area. The data was collected via in-person semistructured interviews. The participants were willing to freely share their experience and opinions, and most of them were eager for me to share the results of my study with them.

Through the review of the literature and the completion of the interviews, I understood the types of successful strategies that B & M retailers could use to create and enhance customer engagement. It was interesting to learn that the themes I thought I would hear in their interviews were not the main themes. The themes I heard were more focused on engagement and connection between the store associate and the customer.

While the participants were comfortable sharing their customer engagement strategies with me, I felt as though the retailer didn't understand the value and competitive advantage that these strategies could bring to their business. This exercise helped to broaden my perspective and validate the need and the purpose of conducting research.

Conclusion

Customer experience is an important part of a B & M retail experience. As customers have many options from different retailers to fulfill their shopping needs, creating an engaging customer experience is a means to a differentiated shopping experience. This differentiated customer experience could be what sets the retailer apart from their competition. In an ever-competitive landscape, customer experience has become an important component for B & M retailers. In this study, I identified and discussed a few factors that could lead to a differentiated customer experience. Those identified strategies are fun at work, customer connection, relationship, pride, and genuine care. When used appropriately by B & M retail store managers, these strategies have the potential to create deeper customer relationships and increased revenues.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
What to do	What to say
Introduce the interview and define the purpose	I'm Jeff Haddox; thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. We'll use the next few minutes to go through the questions; please provide your thoughts and feel free to ask any clarifying questions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch for non-verbal cues. • Paraphrase if needed. • Ask follow-up and probing questions to provide more in-depth understanding. 	1. Please describe the strategies that you have used to engage customers to shop at your store.
	2. How have you assessed the effectiveness of your strategies used to engaged customers?
	3. Which strategies did you find to be most successful?
	4. How did your customers respond to the different strategies that you have utilized?
	5. Please describe specific in-store experiences that your store provides that cannot be replicated in an online shopping channel?
	6. Based upon your experiences and customers' feedback, what are the sensory experiences that create the best responses from your customers?
	7. What else can you tell me about your successful customer engagement strategies?
Wrap up interview by thanking the participant.	Thank you for taking the time to share this valuable information with me today.
Schedule follow-up for member checking.	I would like to schedule a follow-up meeting to share the transcripts and summary of today's interview to ensure that I have accurately captured the information in your responses. When would be a good time for you?

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Retail Store Managers

1. Please describe the strategies that you have used to engage customers to shop at your store.
2. How have you assessed the effectiveness of your strategies used to engage customers?
3. Which strategies did you find to be most successful?
4. How did your customers respond to the different strategies that you have utilized?
5. Please describe specific in-store experiences that your store provides that cannot be replicated in an online shopping channel.
6. Based upon your experiences and customers' feedback, what are the sensory experiences that create the best responses from your customers?
7. What else can you tell me about your successful customer engagement strategies?

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation

[Redacted]

July 30, 2018

Dear Jefferson Haddox,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Strategies Used by Retail Store Managers to Engage Customers* within the [Redacted]. As part of this study, I authorize you to recruit store managers from a pre-approved list provided by [Redacted] collect qualitative data via in-person interviews, and conduct follow-up conversations as needed for member checking. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: Allowing the store manager to participate and use of the store managers office during the interviews. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in Proquest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

[Redacted]